

Running Heading: US & THEM

'Us' and 'Them': Ulster Loyalist Perspectives on the IRA and Irish Republicanism

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on data from one-to-one interviews with members and former members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Ulster Defence Association (UDA), Red Hand Commando (RHC), Ulster Political Research Group (UPRG) and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) to explore the dynamic and fluid perceptions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin among Ulster loyalists. The article will explore how attitudes and perceptions are influenced by the shifting political landscape in Northern Ireland as Ulster loyalists come to terms with the new realities created by the peace-process, security normalization, decommissioning and the rise in the threat of dissident republican violence. The article will also demonstrate that these perceptions are not purely antagonistic and based on the creation of negative stereotypical 'enemy images' fuelled by decades of conflict, but pragmatic, bound to societal and local events and influenced by intragroup attitudes and divisions, in addition to the expected conflictual ingroup vs. outgroup relationships. Finally, the paper will explore how loyalists employ republicanism and the transformation of the Provisional IRA in particular, as a mirror or benchmark to reflect on their own progress since 1994.

Key Words: Northern Ireland, Paramilitaries, Republicanism, Loyalism, Conflict Transformation.

In its contemporary usage the term 'loyalist' has been around since at least the conflict surrounding the formation of the state of Northern Ireland in the early 1920s, but it acquired its current form with the beginning of widespread inter-communal violence in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. Its paramilitary expression quickly took shape resulting in some, often more advantaged unionists, quickly separating from the term and putting distance between themselves and working class loyalists. Behind the sectarianism, which enveloped Northern Irish society was the construction of the dangerous 'Other', which in many cases was used to 'justify' the killing and mayhem that took place. More widely it saw the development of a society based on 'us' and 'them' stereotypes (Burton, 1978; O'Donnell, 1977), which has largely characterized working class life ever since, witness the media portrayal of the loyalists engaged in recent disputes over identity surrounding parades and the flying of the Union Flag at Belfast's City Hall.

But there were other forces present with loyalist paramilitarism; some saw themselves as soldiers engaged in a war with republicanism, they along with others actively disengaged from politically motivated violence after the Belfast Agreement, convinced in the belief that the war was over (Ferguson, et al, 2015). There was also a politically minded grouping based within the paramilitaries that had from the mid-1970s sought to identify and to partly accommodate the views of the two communities. They were far from universally accepted but their views were highly influential in eventually bringing about the peace process (McAuley, 1999; 2000). Loyalist paramilitary groups largely, although not without objection, overcame dissent from within their own ranks and the objections by those within the wider unionist community who rebuffed concession and settlement. Not all have accepted this

position, but the contemporary reaction of loyalist paramilitarism as we shall see has differed to that which has gone before.

This article explores the views of those who joined loyalist paramilitary groups, alongside those who were imprisoned, on how they regard their relationships with Irish republicanism, throughout the conflict and into the peace process. Some of those interviewed have gone through the entire gamut, were engaged in politically motivated violence, imprisoned, then became actors in the Peace Process, and subsequently in post-conflict politics. The article draws on members and former members of the UVF, RHC, UDA, and their respective political wings, the PUP and UPRG.

This paper also considers the reactions of loyalist paramilitarism to the current cycle of dissident republican violence, and the political relationships between loyalism and republicanism in the contemporary period. It argues that republican violence still has an effect on the loyalist community and that loyalist paramilitary organisations have largely effectively managed responses to this during the transition from conflict to post-conflict society. In so doing this article will make reference to collective identities, illustrate how attitudes and perceptions are influenced by the shifting political landscape in Northern Ireland and how the resulting associations are not purely based on negative 'enemy images' fuelled by decades of conflict, but also influenced by pragmatic attitudes and circumstances.

So why did people join loyalist paramilitary groups? The initial answer lies in the fragmented response of loyalism to the worsening security crisis and the perceived need for a response independent from the existing unionist political leadership. This gave rise to a multitude of organisations springing up amongst the Protestant working class, membership of which drew heavily on existing narratives of

community and constitutional defence (Cusack and McDonald, 1997; McDonald and Cusack 2004). Many also saw the government response, as unconvincing and that state forces were ineffective in meeting the challenge presented by the IRA, and where also either reluctant or unwilling to do so. Hence, many who initially joined paramilitary organizations saw it as a legitimate response to perceived threats to their constitutional position, their localized communities and because of the inability or unwillingness of the state to counter the growing crisis. These motivations are clearly articulated by former UVF member Alistair Little:

The security forces were unable to prevent the bombing, and their increasingly intrusive attempts to gain intelligence about paramilitary activity on both sides of the conflict were causing resentment not only on Catholic estates, but also in my community. ... Increasingly, people on our estate began to feel that not only did they have to find ways of defending themselves from the violence of the IRA, but the very people we looked to for security were making our lives more difficult. ... When any RUC or UDR men were shot dead, my friends and I mourned and promised revenge (Little, 2009: 53).

The initial phase of the conflict was characterised by street violence between Catholics and Protestants, and peaked when Northern Ireland entering a round of tit-for-tat killings as loyalist and republican paramilitaries became embedded as the respective defenders of their cause. As the reaction to the growing conflict became more structured (Harris, 2011), two major loyalist paramilitary organizations dominated loyalism: the UDA founded in 1971 grew out of the wide network of vigilante groups that had appeared in loyalist districts; and the UVF, which although it had surfaced in 1966 began to organize and recruit heavily in the early 1970s. In the

years that followed loyalist paramilitaries were directly accountable for 991 deaths between 1969 and 1998 (McKittrick, Kelters, Feeney and Thornton, 1999) and for a further 98 between 1994 and 2010 (Monaghan and Shirlow, 2011). Since 2010 loyalist groups have not been linked to any murders, but individual members of loyalist groups are implicated in two beatings which resulted in fatalities.

This violence led to a separation of the communities as society splintered along clear ethnic and physical lines (Poole, 1983). Shared cultural reference points and a pre-existing narrative on which to draw allowed individuals to recognize, connect and associate with each other to intensify the feeling of common identity within these separate communities. Inclusion into particular social and political categories offered legitimation to particular groups for their actions and confirmed the reasons why they became engaged in the conflict (Rosland, 2009). The conflict was for many sectarianized as common ground evaporated and Catholics and Protestants split along what became plainly demarcated political lines. One leading member of the UDA gives the following example of this process:

We actually set up a peace group between Catholics and Protestants ... That was pretty successful for a while but then the old suspicions came in, that more Catholics were getting houses than Protestants and they were saying more Protestants were getting houses than Catholics. So we became very suspicious of each other and gradually went our own way. I finished up joining Woodvale Defence Association because I felt that Protestants in the area were in danger and they needed all the help they could possibly get (Andy Tyrie cited in Taylor 1999: 83-84).

The Troubles – Republicans as the ‘Other’

Loyalism emerged from and remains, directed by fear and a dread of the Other. As the perceived level of threat intensified collective identities became polarised resulting in the enforcement of emotional boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. 'Friends' and 'enemies' then became clearly differentiated (Mack, 1990: 124) and importantly, those groups who regarded themselves as wronged increasingly saw the actions of the Other as unjustifiable. Daniel Bar-Tal explains this process as follows:

... societies develop beliefs about being victimized by the opponent.

These beliefs focus on the losses, deaths, the harm, the evil and atrocities committed by the adversary while they delegate the responsibility for the violence solely to the 'other' (Bar-Tal, 2000: 86).

Conflict reinforced stereotypes, accentuating the view of the Other as capable of, and engaged in appalling acts of violence, while confirming the position of one's own group as victims, or at least having no option but to retaliate. Extended conflict 'transforms perceptions, of self, others, and the issues in question, usually with the consequence of less accurate understanding of the other's intention and decreased ability to clearly articulate one's own intentions.' (Lederach, 1995: 18). The tenacity of such stereotypes were based on assumptions that are ascribed widely to the whole group, and linked to prejudices regarding the Other community considering them as antagonistic and to be considered with disdain and derision (O'Donnell, 1977).

The perceived role of the 'dangerous Other' plays a central part in coalescing loyalist identity as well as providing a lens through which to view republicans. Moreover, and equally importantly loyalists must observe eternal vigilance and be ever wary of the traitor within. This identity is further compounded by the presence of sectarianized social relations and social space, one consequence of which is that those living within districts that tend towards either all Protestant or all Catholic

exclusivity express higher levels of within-group cohesion. They also experience stronger levels of prejudice towards the other ethno-political groups than those living in mixed districts (Schmid, et al, 2009: 177 – 197). Hence, at its utmost, every Catholic was seen as a member of the IRA, or at least potentially so, and every Catholic was out to undermine the state. This structured social relationships between republicans and loyalists, as Jackie MacDonald put it:

Everything was to do with attacking the other side, or trying to defend against the other side. Everything was about violence, one way or the other, either giving it or taking it (cited in McAuley and Spencer (eds.), 2011: 220 - 221).

Identity depends upon the maintenance of social and physical boundaries (Bauman, 2001), which confirm the group's understanding of 'us' and 'them'. Jenkins (1996) usefully reminds us that these are processes of 'identification', rather than identity per se. In divided societies such as Northern Ireland, where even in times of lessened conflict the level of social interaction between groups is limited, one of the dominant social relationships remains the sectarianized identification and rejection of the 'them' by the 'us' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; 1986).

In part this draws on a collective memory of loyalism that provides a particular narrative, highlighting its 'origins', through for example, the 36th (Ulster) Division sacrifice at the Somme in 1916, and the course of conflict as forming the basis for identifying the 'enemy'. It is a narrative that is strengthened by notions of us and them, whereby events are interpreted through a closed narrative, offering only extremely limited interpretations of the past, and presenting the Other as the instigators of the conflict and the cause of its prolongation. This process is common in ingroup conflict situations (Brewer, 2010; Tonge, 2014) and thus, this loyalist

narrative is typical of conflict discourses produced elsewhere which construct a notion of a different and menacing Other (Bell, 2003; Edkins, 2003). The more intimidating or threatening the Other is seen, the greater the contrast is, and in the case of loyalists in Northern Ireland all republicans, nationalists (and therefore most Catholics) were quickly reinforced as a dangerous Other.

When loyalism places these groups within this category it considers them as untrustworthy and disloyal, and therefore excluded from the dominant culture and social structure of the state (White, 2001). Often this construction was completed through a variety of negative stereotypes applied to describe the oppositional community and used to reinforce senses of inclusion and exclusion, seen to exist outside the social and moral boundaries of one's own community. For Tajfel (1981) such stereotypes serve three main functions: scapegoating the other; providing social justification for the actions of the in-group; and emphasizing social differentiation. More often than not in Northern Ireland this manifested as sectarian difference and for some the feeling of hostility aroused is so intense as to legitimize a violent repost (Ferguson, Muldoon and McKeown, 2014).

During the Troubles these differences were amplified through exposure to physical force, whether experienced directly or indirectly (Fields, 1989), and for some the resulting negative characterization of the Other intensified to the point they were seen as undeserving of any normal level of social engagement or human sympathy (Bar-Tal, 2013). For many within the loyalist community these feelings were intense. David Ervine, one-time leader of the PUP, put it this way:

When my society is attacked from without, the questions and the challenges enter my community like an Exocet missile and explode inside, causing fear and trepidation - or further fear and trepidation. We then do

what all tribes do; we weld ourselves into an homogeneous unit to be driven by the lowest common denominator because of the fear of what is outside the tribe. ... It is a question of defining who we are and what we are; the simple terms in which we see ourselves and indeed in which others see us are quite frankly frightening (Ervine, cited in McAuley, 2002).

In part, it was the construction of such views and stereotypes that allowed for the continuation of the cycle of violence that Northern Ireland entered and for the tit-for-tat reprisals experienced throughout much of the Troubles. It also allowed the widening of the definition of a 'legitimate target', by those who desired it, beyond those directly involved in republicanism to include many ordinary Catholics. This is recognised by some loyalists as made clear by this UDA member:

I think in the latter stages, late 80s/early 90s, loyalist paramilitaries were killing more Catholics. Innocent Catholics it had to be said, but the way it was and the way our thinking was, if the IRA killed one prod, we're going to kill 5 to 10 Catholics. I think that the Catholic community got up and got onto republicans and got onto the IRA and said we can't have this, this has to stop. I believe that we drove SF/IRA to the table to talk (UDA member, 15/ 02/ 2007).

Such views were clearly reinforced by wider ingroup beliefs about the inhuman and evil nature the Other and the use of negative stereotypes to delegitimize republicanism (Ferguson and Cairns, 1996). Indeed these processes go beyond Northern Ireland and as Daniel Bar-Tal suggests, in political conflict, the intense negative categorization of the Other often means the adversarial group is denied their humanity, essentially seen as evil and inhuman (Bar-Tal, 2003: 80).

Eiser (1971, 1973) additionally demonstrated how people tend to define themselves in positive terms while placing the Other in a negative light. Loyalist paramilitarism remains focused on a discourse whereby the Other is seen as not just different but also 'untrustworthy', as Republicans sought to undermine the very state they lived in. Through this process the status of one's own group was confirmed as sufferer and as victim. In such circumstances the life of a member of one's ingroup is often seen as of higher worth than that of a member of the Other (Manktelow, 2007). How these group boundaries and stereotypes are created and how this creation can feed into decisions about who is a legitimate target and create a process when the moral restraints against killing can be overcome are articulated by a UDA member:

They had to be IRA men or INLA men or involved in militant republicanism. Mainstream republicanism – I have no problems with nationalism. I can accept they have an aspiration to have a united Ireland. ... For me, they had to be involved in militant republicanism for me to target them and I'm quite happy about the people I targeted because I know for a fact that they were involved in militant republicanism (UDA member, 14/02/07).

Indeed, most loyalist paramilitaries viewed the situation in a similar manner, seeing themselves as 'soldiers' in a fight against Irish republicanism, and many believe this fight has been won. Take the views of this man:

I do believe we did achieve our core objectives. We achieved them. Not only that but it drove the IRA to talk, to doing the politics, because it was a war (UDA member, 15/02/07).

The UVF didn't claim that they had directly defeated republicanism but it did confirm its support to the principles upon which its 1994 ceasefire was founded. Once these people saw the war was over, the republican ceasefires were established and there was evidence that the Union had been secured, then they largely dropped out of active loyalism. For some this meant a drift into criminality, while others simply returned to 'civilian' life, often as voluntary or community workers.

Loyalism's Political Voices

If we are to consider the transition away from violence and how the movement towards a post-conflict society occurred we need to reflect on another trend within loyalism. This identifies some form of accommodation with Irish republicanism and gives some recognition to the legitimacy of the Other (although not conceding ideological or political space). Throughout the conflict both the UDA and UVF have produced political representatives and those seeking to represent a political view within loyalism. The individuals involved, however, have not always been distinct from those giving primacy to military activities and to add to this they have sometimes been highly active in militarism and then taken a political turn.

Loyalist political activity can be traced back to around the mid-1970s and although the strength of political organisation, and the desire to find some form of public political expression, varied considerably over time, itself often determined by broader levels of violence, it manifested most recently in the grouping that became known as 'new loyalism'. This witnessed the UVF through the PUP, and to a lesser extent the UDA by way of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) promoting a distinct political platform (McAuley, 1996, 2004). New loyalism included a suspicion of the established unionist leadership; a willingness to engage directly with political adversaries; the expression of distinctive and clear-cut positions within unionism,

especially on social and economic issues; the promotion of class and to a lesser extent gendered interpretations of loyalism; and, overall the advancement of a broad set of pluralist cultural and political values.

Surprisingly for organisations with a record of sectarian killing, the UDA and UVF have a political history of restrained and judicious political policies. Novosel (2013) has argued that by the mid-1970s the UVF were openly questioning the futility of violence, while Harris (2008) has indicated that from around that time various loyalist paramilitary groupings were seeking to devise exit strategies from conflict. The UDA formed the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) and launched a policy document called Common Sense in 1987, advocating power sharing. Despite these early contributions the output was neither sustained nor had the legitimacy to establish itself across unionism.

The period immediately surrounding the 1994 ceasefires, however, again saw the opening up of debate within many loyalist communities and the active participation of various community representatives drawn from a range of individuals including, politicised paramilitary members, former paramilitary prisoners, councillors, community activists, women's groups and other concerned local people. Part of this involved constructing a more socially aware politics directly challenging the established unionist leadership (McAuley, 2005).

But none of this was straightforward or uncontested. Witness the serious problems in 2000 when a vicious feud was fought between the UVF and the UDA, while in 2002 the UDA turned on itself with destructive results. All of this did little to convince the public of the paramilitaries political credentials. The political route taken was non-linear and while the UVF grouping was largely non-interventionist and largely able to take its membership with them (at least to the point where the

membership allowed the political voice to be heard), the same could not be said of the UDA. By the late-1990s the belief that British citizenship had been undermined by the Agreement was widespread within the ranks of the UDA. This was to become a consistent and growing reference point for the UDP. Indeed, a spokesperson was later to claim that the rank and file of the UDA were never pro-Agreement, and that any positivity towards the Agreement was always leadership led rather than located in the ordinary membership who largely mistrusted the peace process (Garland, 2003). Indeed reports emerged that five out of the six brigades who made up the UDA leadership opposed the peace process (*Belfast Telegraph*, 11 January 2001).

The weight of such views amongst members, and the drift of the then UDA leadership away from regarding politics as a central goal, brought growing apathy towards the whole political project. The situation was not helped by the organisation increasingly being pulled in different directions by internal feuds and conflicts surrounding the political stance of the organisation. As a result, the UDP was dissolved in 2001 and replaced by the Ulster Political Research Group (UPRG) largely composed of those who were much more approving of the UDA leadership. It was charged with providing political analysis, rather than acting as a political party or seeking public representation (*East Belfast Observer* 13 May 2004).

Against this background, the UPRG began to develop an identifiable political direction through its engagement with the notion of conflict transformation (Hall, 2006; 2007). This posed significant internal problems of trust and confidence amongst leaders with regard to collectively transforming the UDA from a paramilitary organization into a community development organization. Central to this was the member's relationship with republicanism. The UDA leadership were faced with a membership who did not wholly subscribe to the view that republicanism and the

PIRA were genuine in their rejection of armed conflict. The debates made clear the mistrust of republicans and their objectives, such as at the following meeting:

When a show of hands was called for (in each area) on the question, ‘ was the war over?’ a majority of participants stated that the war was not over. However, when this was probed further it was apparent that most members thought that while the IRA’s *military* [emphasis in original] war might [emphasis my own] be over, their *political* [emphasis in original] war was certainly not. For the IRA it was a change in tactics, but their goal remained the same – a united Ireland (Hall, 2006: 10-11).

The development of the PUP and UDP/UPRG represented a crucial attempt by many loyalists to refine the parameters within which they interpreted their political world (McAuley, 2004). The coming to public prominence of the PUP and UDP marked the revelation of a clear political dynamic representing distinctive ideological positions firmly rooted within working class community experiences as these parties sought to stretch the distance between themselves and the traditional political representatives of unionism. This was reflected in claims to directly challenge the roles played by ‘out – dated’ unionist politicians, and it was claimed that the: ‘Protestant people have woken up to [their] phoney politics’ (*Irish Times*, 24 March 1997). In the more recent post-agreement context the interpretation of an increasingly marginalised Protestant working class has formed the bedrock from which to reconstruct and reinterpret loyalism’s political past and to reposition both itself, and its relationship with republicanism.

While some of the above clearly indicated political movement, uncertainties persisted as to whether the views of the UDP/UPRG and PUP marked a lasting shattering of unionist ideology, or merely some fleeting expression of loyalist

community concerns. Hence, support for the transition towards the new politics offered from loyalist paramilitaries proved difficult to sustain. New loyalism had difficulty in maintaining the political momentum envisaged by its leading proponents. Not least the continuing violence in which loyalist paramilitaries were embroiled in during the post-agreement feuds within and between the UDA and UVF impacted on the political credibility of the groupings. Increasingly an analysis that in the contemporary period the Protestant working class have lost out politically, socially and economically to a nationalist/republican agenda gained currency within loyalism and unionism more widely (Bean, 2011). With this narrative of loss gaining greater acceptance within loyalism the transforming frame created by the PUP and to a lesser extent the UDP closed rapidly as loyalism became ever more fragmented and sections within it appeared increasingly unable, or unwilling to change, particularly when many loyalists perceive themselves victimized in republican initiated 'culture war' on Protestant cultural heritage and symbols of British identity (Halliday and Ferguson, 2015).

Indeed, since the beginning of the flag protests at the end of 2012 and the stand off at Twaddell Avenue identities in Northern Ireland have hardened and community relations have deteriorated across Northern Ireland (Morrow, Robinson, and Dowds, 2013; Northern Ireland Life and Times, 2012, 2013). This deterioration led to Richard Haass (US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland and Chair of the Hass/O'Sullivan talks in 2013) to suggest that the moral basis of the 1998 peace accord had disintegrated and that Northern Ireland could no longer be held up as a model of conflict resolution to the rest of the world (The Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, 2014).

Contemporary Relations with Republicanism

The journey that loyalism has taken since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, has therefore not been unproblematic, but despite this, loyalist commitment to a transformed society has endured, albeit at times in an imperfect way (Shirlow, 2012; Wood, 2006). But this does not mean the concession of ideological space to republicanism, reflected in the following statement by a member of the Red Hand Commando:

... it is positive in that you can engage with them and you can talk to them ... they have an affinity with working-class issues, they can recognise the common issues between Protestants and Catholics. But they are no more positive than what the progressive thinking within loyalism is. I mean they have their red necks, they have their sectarianism, although they have tried to say that the war was a pure freedom fighters war. Statistics don't stand up to that. The number of innocent people killed, the number of sectarian killings that they were involved with and sectarian actions, I mean they don't accept that and they will not accept it, and they try to sanitise their war instead of being honest like loyalists. One thing about loyalism, it was brutally honest and admits that part of it was a reaction and part was sectarian, as much as what the republicans were (member of the Red Hand Commando, 31/05/2006).

The discussions over the intent of Republicanism mirrors the difference highlighted by loyalist paramilitary members in their approach to conflict transformation. Often there is a degree of veneration and respect mixed with antagonism and resistance. This can be clearly seen in the following statements:

You can't fight an enemy and not start to admire [them] because the minute you start to take them for granted, you're a dead man. I always

held them in high esteem that way. I admire their commitment. I mean, when they talked about the 100 year war we used to laugh. But if you look, it is their 100 year war and its generation after generation. We didn't realize, nobody here – you can't fight a 100 year war. But they've proved they can. If you take from 1922. So I admire their commitment and I would also, I would have to admit I admire their courage (UDA Member, 15/02/2007).

Reconstructing the 'Other'?

So what evidence is there that the Other has been rethought or reconstructed in the contemporary period? Certainly the lack of political representation expressed by working-class Protestants, alongside high levels of disconnection from mainstream unionist politics has meant some movement in the Protestant working class identity and world views. But in which direction? The mistrust of the British Government, high levels of anxiety about the robustness of the settlement, combined with the actions of dissident republican groups which demonstrate that political violence did not end with the signing of the Agreement and confirm longer standing fears surrounding republican commitments to democracy make identity reconstruction difficult. Thus there is no linearity in progress towards reconciliation, with some changes suggesting positive moves away from entrenched identities; while others seem to drag social relations backwards.

While there is little doubt that former prisoners have played an significant role in positively reconstructing the Other there remain obstacles to the enlargement of social trust more widely. Despite the positive influences that many former combatants have in community development wide ideological and political distance persists between them. Individuals may have constructed working, even cordial, relationships

but social trust is not extensive or pervasive (Bean, 2011; Ferguson and McAuley, this issue). While recognising that Sinn Féin do a good job for 'their' community this lack of trust it is also acknowledged. One UPRG member expressed this as follows:

Sinn Féin for all their faults – the lies, the spin they've put on things – they are a grassroots party ... which loyalism and unionism hasn't got – they work on the streets, with the people on bread and butter issues and at the end of the day they produce results from that, unlike our politicians. So there'd be a lot of respect there for the things they done and we wouldn't agree with their beliefs or anything but there's a lot of respect there for things they've achieved (UPRG member, 5/04/05).

It is important, therefore, not to overstate ideological movement both within and across both groupings. We have discussed how the conflict has been experienced through the delegitimisation and demonisation of the Other (Bar-Tal, 2003) and how core values have been maintained in post-settlement Northern Ireland. The strength of collective memory sustains explanations of the past. These memories have not fundamentally altered and formed the basis of what many loyalists see as a culture war with republicanism. Although reconciliation has taken place this has largely been accumulated by highlighting shared concerns and endorsing ideologies of community activism above those of violence. The latest wave of agitation by dissident republicans have brought back to the fore suspicions of a 'dangerous Other'.

Contemporary loyalist views of republicans are mediated through three major concerns: the dissident military campaign; issues surrounding the writing of the past and discourses surrounding loyalist identity. While in the latter two loyalists are engaged in a struggle for hearts and minds largely with Sinn Féin, the first raises

concerns over the reactivation of a republican campaign. In recent years these have been a concerted, if largely low level, series of attacks mounted by republican dissidents raising concerns amongst loyalists around a return to a full scale struggle. This was particularly heightened following the killing members of the security forces in March 2009. Since then there has been increased demands for a response from loyalism. While the repost of former paramilitaries has been uniformly opposed to violent retaliation it has not been straightforward. This former prisoner provides an overview:

I think the war is over, but the history of republicanism would indicate that there's always going to be somebody about who is going to try and make waves and do it in a violent way. ... I think most of republicanism has bought into administering the apparatus of the state (PUP Executive member, 5/07/2007).

It is against this background that the current relationships with republicanism must be seen. Despite the many setbacks and interruptions to the peace process the paramilitary leadership have with some noteworthy exceptions controlled their rank-and-file membership. This is of no little consequence when we consider the tendency of loyalist paramilitary groups to move to violence. It is almost inconceivable that during the Troubles such events would not have precipitated a direct reprisal of violent revenge.

Important here is the reliance on State forces, something that did not exist during the Troubles. One paramilitary leader explains:

People still come to the paramilitaries for some sort of justice, should it be a family dispute, or because someone has had something stolen or

because somebody has been beaten up in the street. The paramilitaries are now telling people they must go to the PSNI, but the PSNI are doing nothing about it because they haven't got the resources. ... People have to have confidence in the PSNI, so they have to get results. It is going to be ridiculous if the whole peace process falls apart because the PSNI hasn't got the resources to deal with the problems (cited in McAuley and Spencer, (eds.) 2011: 215).

But there do remain 'major concerns' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 15 April 2010) in the loyalist community. For the loyalist groups, the threat of dissident republican activity has again brought to the fore fears that the 'war' may not be over. Most, however, largely continue to believe that mainstream republicans understand the context of such violence and despite faults are committed to the peace process. Both the mainstream UDA and UVF (for somewhat differing reasons) question the logic of retaliation and consider any counter-violence would be futile. They nonetheless recognise that dissident republicans are capable of destabilising Northern Ireland by a future escalation of their campaign. Thus as one journalist put it: 'dissidents won't get a bye ball from loyalists forever' (Murray, *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 April 2010).

Most loyalists have made clear divisions between Provisional and dissident republicanism. A general sense of outrage, Martin McGuinness's statements distancing Sinn Féin from the murders of members of the PSNI and British Army and mainstream republican rejection of dissident violence seem to have been deciding factors. Loyalist paramilitaries have largely held their members in check, and questioned the logic of retaliation, deciding that any counter-violence would be futile (Harris, 2012, Shirlow, 2012). However, members of the unionist community feel the need to remain vigilant against dissident republican attempts to stir up the loyalist

community and many believe that a deterioration in relations to be the next strategic step by dissident republicans who seek to destabilize Northern Ireland. Moreover, there is a belief that the political option appears unworkable against a resurgent tradition of violent resistance. Nor do loyalists fully trust the British Government to defend them if such a situation was to occur, believing that ultimately they will always have to look to themselves to protect Northern Ireland if there is a return to conflict.

While there is little support for a return to violence the perspective that loyalists are increasingly marginalised does find support in loyalist communities. As one loyalist former prisoner put it 'there's a different type of conflict is going on now' (UVF member, Belfast March 2007). For some that involves a 'culture war'.. In relation to this objective many loyalists remain irritated regarding what they see as the inability of republicans to allow unionists and loyalists to develop and entrench their own cultural interests and sense of identity. They believe that republicans are all too intent to try and dispel the legitimacy of both loyalist culture and identity. Because of this there is a sense in the unionist/loyalist community that they are constantly being pursued by republicans who cannot look beyond their passion for an Ireland that never existed.

Reconciliation and Transformation – an uncertain future

Although conflict transformation and resolution processes are now entrenched in loyalist politics, there is a continued elevated social distance between republican and loyalist communities, which reflect the lack of social bonding between them (Cairns, 1989). Part of the reason for this is because both draw on distinct collective memories of the conflict, which are made relevant only to ingroup members' lives (Bar-Tal and Labin, 2001: 268).

In constructing loyalist identity the importance of past events cannot be overstated, and the salience of their memories will continue to negatively structure relationships with the Other in the present and future. The link between collective memory and communal violence is well defined (Brewer, 2006) and memories of conflict (and particular understandings of it) ensure old enmities are upheld (McAuley, 2016, *forthcoming*). Many loyalists fear that a reconciliation process would culminate with members of the IRA being considered victims of the conflict and having the same moral equivalence to civilians, policemen or members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, or other colleagues in the security question (Lawther, 2011; 2012; 2013; Edwards, 2012). Indeed, Billy Hutchinson (Ferguson and McAuley, this issue) outlines the challenges faced by loyalists in challenging this republican narrative and maintaining the legitimacy of the role of loyalists in the conflict.

Conclusion

The relationship between contemporary loyalism and republicanism is more complex than many would imagine. The focus remains on the collective memory of the conflict, the narrative of which remains prejudiced and one-sided. When such a narrative is adopted in the collective memory it plays a major role in the course of a conflict, insofar as it shapes the reactions of each party positively towards itself and negatively towards its rival. Past experiences of violence are passed on in collective memory enhanced by the continued physical and social separation of both communities in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

This background creates boundaries to any potential altering of perceptions of the Other. The war for most is over, certainly for the generation who fought it. However, society is still deeply divided, and the role of communal narratives continues to reinforce views of the Self and the Other. Such beliefs are passed on

within communities and socialised across generations reinforcing existing fears, prejudices, and stereotypes. Therefore republican violence still has an effect on the loyalist community and in response loyalist paramilitary organisations have largely effectively managed this threat without a return to violence during the transition from conflict. That is not to say that for many the contemporary political situation is defined in oppositional terms, witness the frustration percolating manifest in the dispute around parades and flags and the rhetoric of a 'cultural war', in many predominantly Protestant working class areas

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